
Iowa Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Prison Visitation Facilities

ISSUE

Examine the current situation and issues associated with prison inmates receiving visitors.

AFFECTED AGENCIES

Department of Corrections

CODE AUTHORITY

Section 904.512, Code of Iowa and 201 IAC 23.2

BACKGROUND

Inmates are permitted to have visitors as a privilege and to allow inmates to maintain contact with family and law-abiding friends. This is thought to be a stabilizing influence and beneficial for rehabilitation.

During the 1995 Legislative Session, the concern was raised that overcrowding of the visitation facility was negatively impacting family members' visits at the Correctional Institution for Women at Mitchellville. Senate File 481 (Transportation and Capitals Appropriation Bill) appropriated \$100,000 for FY 1996 to the Mitchellville prison to remodel the visitation area. The Department of Corrections, in consultation with an architect, identified four options to meet the prison's visitation space needs. Each option cost in excess of \$300,000. After a review and site visit, the Legislative Fiscal Committee recommended that the Joint Justice System Appropriations Subcommittee consider the issue during the 1996 budget hearings.

Prison System Visitation Policies. Inmates may be visited by persons on their approved visiting lists. The list typically includes immediate family members (parents, siblings, grandparents, children, stepparents, stepchildren, foster parents), other relatives (aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, and in-laws), and two friends. All persons on the list are subject to a background check by the Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI), Department of Public Safety. Persons are excluded from the visiting list if they present a risk to the order and security of the institution or if their visits would be counter-productive to an inmate's rehabilitation. Typical examples of excluded persons include individuals recently discharged from a correctional institution; persons who are potential control problems (history of

concealed weapons, use of illegal substances, or previous violation of institutional rules); persons under indictment; individuals on probation, work release, or parole; or someone on another inmate's visiting list.

Institution Concerns. Security and behavior control are the primary issues in providing visits. Specific concerns include:

- Contraband (weapons, illegal substances, or alcohol) introduced by visitors.
- Proper conduct. This includes preventing arguments and assaults between visitors and inmates, sexual misconduct, and disruption from unruly children.
- Privacy to allow inmates and visitors to have personal conversations.
- Staffing to monitor all activities.

Visitation Area Design. The basic design requirements the Department has identified for a visiting facility include:

- A reception and waiting area for visitors, including an area that permits strip searches of visitors suspected of carrying contraband.
- Space and technology to facilitate identification and processing of visitors. (Smooth processing reduces frustration from visitors waiting and being checked.)
- Property storage area for visitors.
- A separate area to process and search inmates for weapons and other contraband.
- Adequate space to accommodate the maximum number of visitors, while maintaining good visibility by staff.
- Efficient staffing pattern that allows positioning of a minimal number of correctional officers who have maximum surveillance of the area.
- A no-contact visiting area.
- Rooms for confidential visits with lawyers and clergy.
- Separate restrooms for visitors and inmates (to prevent visitors from hiding contraband to be retrieved later by inmates).
- Separate entrances (prevents inmates from leaving with visitors).
- Accommodations for children.
- Durable and easily searched furniture and fixtures.
- Acoustical design to control noise.
- Design flexibility that permits using the room for other purposes when not being used for visiting.

Problems Encountered by Visitors and Inmates. The Department indicates that visitor and inmate problems are prompted by the frustrations of delays, complying with security procedures, and intrusions by staff upon their privacy. Factors causing frustration include:

- Visitors traveling long distances and possibly having visits shortened or denied.

- Visitors waiting to be verified, possibly searched, and then waiting while the inmates are located and brought to the visiting area. Sometimes inmates refuse to meet with visitors.
- Encountering objectionable language and insulting behavior by other inmates.
- Lack of privacy to discuss family and intimate concerns.
- Limited space and activities for small children.
- Inmates' uncertainty about if and when visitors are coming, and disappointment if they do not come.
- Inmates having their scheduled treatment, education, or work programs disrupted.
- Arguments that develop between inmates and family members or other visitors.
- Visitors having personal conflicts with other visitors or other inmates who happen to be present.

CURRENT SITUATION

The Department of Corrections provided **Attachment I** to describe the major characteristics of the visitation facilities at each prison. Some observations include:

- Visitation facilities are generally rated to accommodate an inmate population the same size as the general prison design capacity. Oakdale and Mitchellville have visitation facilities that are smaller than would be expected from the prison design capacity.
- The visitation facilities are generally designed for an inmate to have three to five visitors at one time.
- Visiting schedules vary by prison. Most permit visiting five or six days per week, including both Saturday and Sunday. The Rockwell City institution is only open for visits four days per week and does not permit visits on Sunday.
- Visitation areas are most commonly staffed by two correctional officers, with Ft. Madison requiring the most with nine.
- The time visitors spend with inmates varies, with three hours being a common average.
- The average waiting time for visitors ranges from an estimated low of five to ten minutes at the Newton institution to a high of 36 minutes at the Rockwell City institution.
- On peak visiting days, the ratio of visitors to inmates range from 0.07 visitors per inmate at the Clarinda institution to 0.29 visitors per inmate at the Mitchellville institution and 0.27 at the Newton institution. In other words, the Mitchellville and Newton institutions have more visitors, relative to their inmate populations, than do the other prisons. The estimated average waiting time increases on peak days but is generally an hour or less, except for the Mitchellville institution which has an estimated average waiting time of two to three hours.
- When the number of visitors exceeds what the prison can accommodate, the prison usually limits the time a visitor may spend with an inmate. The Oakdale institution expands the visiting hours to accommodate the excess of visitors. The Ft. Madison institution manages

visiting on a first come, first served basis, and those who cannot be accommodated are turned away.

ALTERNATIVES

The Department did not include any budget requests for FY 1997 relating to visitation facilities at any of the prisons. The Department amended the administrative rules in March 1995 to allow all prisons to shorten the maximum time permitted for visiting an inmate when too many visitors come at one time. The General Assembly may want to consider the following alternatives:

- Continue with the current facilities and allow the Department to adjust visiting periods and availability as needed.
- Appropriate funds for the option proposed by the Department or request the Department to develop alternative recommendations, including cost estimates. Consideration could be given to using different structural materials and designs than those proposed (ex. prefabricated buildings).
- Require the Department to explore staffing and policy changes and develop cooperative efforts with inmates' families and visitors. For example, visitors could be apprised of the situation and visits could be scheduled, visitors could be encouraged to come during the week, or visiting hours could be expanded if visitors could come at those times.

BUDGET IMPACT

The Department prepared a recommendation for the Legislative Fiscal Committee to construct a free-standing structure for inmate visiting at Mitchellville, at a cost of \$364,000. The Department has indicated that most of the prisons need more space or more staffing for inmate visiting. Detailed recommendations and cost estimates for the other prisons were not included.

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IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
Visiting Room Information
November 28, 1995

	Ft. Madison	Anamosa	Oakdale	Mt. Pleasant	Newton	Clarinda	Rockwell City	Mitchellville
Current Count	902	1530	1061	938	317	342	444	387
Design Capacity	810 (Max-550) (Med-100) (Min-150)	840 (Med) 71 (Min-L.H.)	520	528	121 (Min) 100 (Violator)	152	228	173 (Med) 60 (Violator)
Design Capacity Visitation	810	840 (Med) 54 (L.H.)	300	528	121	152	228	100
Inmates	Max-120 Med-52 Min-30+30	32 + 12 No Contact 44 - Inmate/Visitor Mix (L.H.)	26	30	25 (Inside) 17 (Outside)	10 (1 No Contact)	14	60
Visitors	Combined inmate & visitor	107 + 21 No Contact	64	150 (8 No Contact)	75 (Inside) 65 (Outside)	55	51 (includes no contact)	Inmate/Visitor Mix
FT²	Max-5200 Med-765 Min-220	4280 (includes support space) 1172 + outside L.H.	1478 270 (No Contact)	1600	1200 (Inside) 1000 (Outside)	513	1300	975
Schedule	8:00/4:00 M, W, Th, F 8:00/8:00 Sat & Sun Closed T Time varies by facility	1:00/8:00 M, W, Th, F 8:15./7:30 Sat, Sun, Hol <u>Luster Heights</u> 6:00/9:00 M-F 1:00/9:00 Sat, Sun, Hol	10:30./8:00 Th - M Closed T & W	12:00/7:30 p.m. T, Th, Sat 9:00 a.m./3:30 p.m. Sun, W, F Closed M (unless holiday)	5:45/9:45 M - F 8:15/4:30 Sat & Sun	8:00/3:30 M & Th 12:00/7:30 F 9:00/7:30 Sat & Sun Closed T & W	8:30/3:30 Sat - M 12:30/7:30 Th & F Closed Sun, T, W (unless holiday)	9:30/4:30 M, T, F, Sat & Holidays 9:30/7:30 Sun Closed W and Th
Staffing	9	2/1	4	3	2	2	2	2
Utilization:								
Weekdays	Max-13 Med-24 Min-3	74	75	25	10-15 (plus children)	8	21	30
Weekends	Max-27 Med-51 Min-8-12	121	139	65	35 (plus children)	15	68	41(Sat) 95(Sun)
Allowed Length	Max-4 hrsx5/mo Med-4 hrsx12/mo Min-7 hrs	2-4 hrs depending on security level & demand <u>L.H.</u> - 3 hrs weekdays 4 hrs weekends	1-4 hrs 2-4 times/wk (depending on security level)	Unlimited when available	3 hrs	3 hrs	4 hr weekday 3 hr weekend	3 hrs with add'l 3 hrs if space is available
Average Length	3-5 hrs	Max Time Allowed*	2 hrs	4-5 hrs*	3 hrs	2.5 hrs	2.25 hr	2-3 hrs

	Ft. Madison	Anamosa	Oakdale	Mt. Pleasant	Newton	Clarinda	Rockwell City	Mitchellville
Average Wait	30 min or less	30 min*	20-30 min	20 min*	5-10 min	10-15 min	36 min	15-30 min* (wknds 1+ hrs)
Peak Days:								
# of Visitors	100	200*	150	80-85*	80-90	25		111
Average Wait	30 min or less	30 min*	45 min/1 hr	1 hr*	5-15 min	Up to 1 hr		2-3 hrs
How Excess Handled	1st come, 1st served Then turned away	Visits shortened by 10 min to 1 hr based on demand.	Expanded hrs	2 hr limit (when crowded)	2 hr limit		2 hr limit	Sign up sheet
# Turned Away	Yes (# not available)	No turn downs	None	None	None	None	No turn downs	None
Curtailed Visits		Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Other Steps				8 visits per mo		Move inmates faster		
Needed Improvements	Max-adequate Med-overcrowded Min-overcrowded	Improved security for no contact area	Double existing space Handicap accessible More staff Better furnishings	More space	More visiting room staff Restrooms No contact area Equipment for children	New facility has room for 21 inmates & 5 no contact visits Hours remain the same	Staffing Physical facilities adequate.	More space Children's area, Visitor waiting area Eliminate cross traffic

*Indicates staff estimates

Other figures from institution logs and other documents.

Note:

This attachment was prepared by the Department of Corrections.